

Yesterday, Congressmen Ben Cardin (D-MD), Pete Stark (D-CA), Sander Levin (D-MI) and Robert Matsui (D-CA) released a General Accounting Office report showing that the majority of local welfare programs are not providing disabled and mentally ill welfare recipients with services to help them enter the workforce.

The GAO Report finds that: “Ultimately, many impaired recipients may reach their time limits (for TANF benefits) without suitable employment skills because their impairments have not been properly identified and addressed.”

The GAO’s survey of 600 counties nationwide found that although most counties say they screen TANF recipients for disabilities, the vast majority (88%) relied on recipient self-disclosure or caseworker observations during the initial interview. Based on their screening, almost half of the counties surveyed could not provide any data on how many disabled individuals were on TANF.

“This report highlights the shortcomings of the welfare law, particularly its inability to take care of Americans that are disabled or impaired,” Rep. Stark said. “As Congress works to reauthorize the TANF law next year, we need to focus special attention on the particular needs of disabled individuals.”

“It is unbelievable to me that local TANF programs can say they are screening TANF recipients for disabilities, but cannot identify which TANF recipients have disabilities,” said Congressman Matsui. “In fact, the evidence indicates that many states and counties are really not assessing TANF recipients for disabilities at all.”

“For welfare reform to succeed, all recipients need to have a fair chance to find jobs that will help lift their families out of poverty. That means that if they’re willing to work, we should be willing to provide them with the services and supports they need to find and keep good jobs,” said Congressman Levin.

“We need to work with the States to help them identify and address impairments that may prevent TANF recipients from obtaining employment. The GAO report also highlights the need for much better information and reporting on the services being provided to disabled TANF recipients and on the outcomes for individuals with disabilities when they exit TANF,” concluded Congressman Cardin.

